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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

Interactive expert panel: the global care economy in the context of the changing world of work

Chair's summary

1. On 17 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive expert panel on the topic "The global care economy in the context of the changing world of work", under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Šejla Đurbuzović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), moderated the discussion.

2. The expert panellists were: Emeritus Professor in the Department of Sociology at Essex University, Diane Elson, presenting on behalf of Emeritus Professor at the Open University, Susan Himmelweit; General Secretary of the National Union of Domestic Employees in Trinidad and Tobago, Ida Le Blanc; Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at the University of Toronto, Ito Peng; Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Population Studies of the University of Zimbabwe, Naomi Wekwete; Director of the Department on Conditions of Work and Equality of the International Labour Organization, Manuela Tomei; and Adviser to the Director of the National Care Secretariat of the Ministry of Social Development of Uruguay, Patricia Cossani. Representatives of four Member States, one regional organization and three civil society organizations engaged in the discussion with the panellists.

3. The care economy covers both paid and unpaid care and domestic work. Participants noted that women and girls bear a disproportionate share of such work and that women work longer hours than men globally. Changes are therefore

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required in the care economy in order to address gender inequalities. Participants provided examples of policies and laws aimed at investing in the care economy, improving the quality of care, securing decent work conditions for care workers and supporting the participation of women in the labour force.

Global trends

4. Demand for care is growing. Demographic changes across the world, including a growing and ageing population, with a projected 2 billion ageing persons by 2050 and a sizeable youth population entering child-bearing age, are expected to result in increased global demand for care work, which already faces a deficit of 13.6 million care workers. A significant portion of the jobs of the future will be in the care economy.

5. Participants noted that the growing demand for paid care services has not been met by the public sector, and the private and informal sectors have stepped in to fill those gaps. The migration of care workers is a partial response to meet the increased demand for care. It is critical for the public sector to invest in care systems in order to meet the demand and to regulate care services in a way that will ensure a high quality of care, secure decent work conditions and fair wages.

Gender perspectives in paid and unpaid care work

6. Participants noted that workers in the formal and informal care economies are disproportionately female. Care workers often lack recognition and respect, receive low pay and are subject to insecure employment arrangements, characterized by a lack of employment contracts and contributions to national insurance schemes. Many face abusive work conditions, including sexual and gender-based violence, and dismissal for joining a union or becoming pregnant. The lack of social protection and labour rights for workers in the care economy constitutes a challenge for the economic empowerment of women.

7. Domestic workers make up a significant portion of care workers around the world. There are 67 million domestic workers over the age of 15, 80 per cent of which are women. Worldwide, 1 in 25 women workers is a domestic worker, and almost 1 in 6 domestic workers is an international migrant. Migrant domestic workers are some of the most vulnerable workers.

8. Participants noted that women and girls shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care work, including caregiving responsibilities and household chores within their communities. In one region, two thirds of primary caregivers in households are female. In some rural contexts, women spend nine hours per week collecting water and fire wood, compared with one hour spent by men. Social, economic and health challenges arising from poverty, poor infrastructure and public services, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and recurrent droughts can increase the workload of women.

9. Participants noted that, even when women are employed in the formal economy, they are expected to shoulder the burden of household chores and care work. In some countries, notwithstanding policy and legislative changes aimed at improving gender equality and supporting working women, the bulk of care work still falls on women.

10. The provision and availability of well-regulated and quality care services frees up the time women usually invest in providing care, either to children or the elderly. Although women are able to commit more time to their professional lives by employing care workers, the externalization of care responsibilities does not automatically promote gender equality or encourage men to assume care responsibilities.

11. Participants highlighted the need for intersectional analysis in considering the multiple layers of discrimination that require attention in order to adequately address the needs and rights of caregivers, including those of older women who are often caretakers of multiple generations and young girls who shoulder a greater portion of household chores within the family.

The way forward

12. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Decent Work Agenda of the International Labour Organization (ILO) highlight the importance of paid and unpaid care work and the need to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. To achieve the goals set out therein, participants called upon Governments and all relevant stakeholders to strengthen normative and legal frameworks for full and productive employment and decent work for all women. Participants also called for the ratification without reservations and the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

13. Both sending and receiving countries have critical roles to play in protecting the rights of migrant domestic workers, including through the ratification and implementation at the national level of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), of ILO.

14. It is critical for Governments to invest in the care economy as a shared social responsibility, to regulate care work and to provide care services through the public sector in support of gender equality.

15. Legislative and policy measures need to be complemented by efforts to bring about changes in attitudes and challenge gender stereotypes and social norms. A holistic approach is needed, working at the grass-roots level, with traditional and local leaders, to encourage men to take on shared responsibilities for care work in a more equitable manner within households and communities.